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ABSTRACT

Limited professional focus appears to impair teacher unions' external influence and internal communication. Inquiry and research may be used as a strategy to improve professional focus thereby increasing teacher unions' influence within the profession and helping them effectively address structural change issues. By shifting to the inquiry mode, the union would avoid making immediate responses, which are negatively portrayed, and gain more credibility. Means of supporting inquiry include utilization of electronic mail and World Wide Web sites, training in peer consultation and research, collaboration with external organizations, and support for individual research projects and small networks. Regardless of future policy shifts, a teacher union can participate in inquiry and research with limited resources. Four appendices contain: staff committee project report extracts, pages from "Teacher Inquirer" dealing with British Columbia (Canada) teacher research on the Internet, the English-as-a-Second Language home page, and teacher research in assessment project report extracts. (LH)

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Developing pro-active research roles for teacher unions

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Developing pro-active research roles for teacher unions

Introduction: teacher unions as reactive organizations

Teacher unions have traditionally reacted to initiatives from governments or school boards rather than initiating inquiry into educational issues in order to influence educational change. By being predictably reactive, unions are often viewed as negative forces, critics of educational innovation with narrow vested interests to protect. While educational change initiatives are frequently child-centred, or at least claimed to be so, union reactions are too often portrayed as teacher-centred.

An example to illustrate: during 1996 a Canadian provincial government promoted the development of Charter Schools. The story was covered in a TV national news broadcast. The coverage started with a young, middle-class mother who was enrolling her children in a charter school. She was articulate about educational issues and prepared to be active in supporting the charter school. The coverage showed her constantly on the move, busy and engaged in supporting her children's education. Following this segment was an interview with a union spokesperson. Seated behind a desk, this figure appeared bureaucratic, static and resistant, and seemed to lose the case before a word was uttered. The viewer sensed instantly why she was there - to oppose charter schools, which she proceeded to do. Her arguments against charter schools, while coherent and logical, somehow failed to make any headway against the earlier proponent. One analysis of this coverage could be that the media manipulated the image of the pro-active mother and the static, bureaucratic and reactive union. Perhaps they did, or perhaps they reflected what existed. Whichever analysis of the media one prefers, the end result was typical of what happens to teacher unions when much educational change is proposed. We say no, and however well we argue the case it always looks like 'big union' inertia and self-interest. We are perennially reactive, frequently negative and we usually lose.

Once changes are introduced that unions initially opposed, strategies developed by unions range from facilitation of teachers' work within the new framework by offering professional development through a continuum of other strategies including diversion (where the original intent of the change is altered by practitioners), benign neglect, or active political opposition. Most of these strategies consume considerable union resources and time in various forms of a familiar, entrenched and sometimes soporific series of exchanges between provincial governments and teacher unions.

Key imperatives for teacher unions to address issues differently.

While I have few data to substantiate the following claims, I believe that there are three key imperatives that should motivate Canadian teacher unions to address educational issues differently:

1. We are losing our ability to influence educational change with provincial governments and school boards.

The more predictable our reactions to change initiatives become, the easier they can be factored in by governments and school boards. Once initiatives are operational, strident opposition leaves teacher unions vulnerable to accusations of sabotage, leaving them open to blame for any failure of the mandated innovation.

2. We are losing the confidence of many parents and the public, not in terms of individual teachers' 'ability to teach', but in terms of teachers' collectively addressing structural educational change issues.

Neither parents nor the public give much credibility to the media-reported statements of teacher union representatives, for predictable reasons: we appear (or are made to appear) stale, repetitive, and negative. It is difficult to find media coverage 1996 that gives Canadian teacher unions a positive report on any major issue, reflecting the fact that the professional focus of teacher unions is not apparent to most parents or members of the public.

Few governmental initiatives are research-based, with many being overtly ideologically driven (particularly in areas of governance) or economic in nature (e.g. year-round schools). By responding only in a political manner we lose an opportunity to focus parent and community attention on the frequently limited educational merits of proposals. Such a focus could be achieved through greater union engagement in inquiry and research.

3. With the changing demographics of the teaching population, a new approach is crucial to engage younger teachers in the union movement.

In British Columbia, the average age of teachers is 43. 17,000 teachers, almost 50% of the teaching population, will retire in the next ten years. In their place will be a new cohort of teachers, the first of which are already showing alarming disinterest in the activities of a union which they must join in order to work as a teacher. Younger teachers are minimally engaged in union activities, which currently are the domain of an older group with long memories of many bitter struggles to gain rights and conditions. To many younger teachers such history appears as relevant as the second world war to a teenager. The dichotomy between this older activist group and younger more apathetic members spells danger for the future cohesion and strength of

teacher unions. Two factors may account for the alienation of younger teachers from teacher unions: the perception of younger teachers that teacher unions reflect entrenched positions/thinking and the view that the union's professional focus is token when compared to what is perceived to be the significant focus on bargaining issues.

In all three cases, the limited professional focus of teacher unions appears to be a factor in the limited success of teacher unions' external influence and internal communication. Improving teacher unions' professional focus through inquiry and research can be utilised as a strategy to improve influence and communications. Developing a new research role for teacher unions is therefore aimed at better influencing educational change issues, gaining the confidence of parents and public in terms of how teacher unions address educational issues, and expanding the professional role of teacher unions through collaborative inquiry, thereby engaging more members in union activities which have a professional orientation.

Current teacher union attitudes towards research

Teacher unions' efforts to undertake professionally-oriented research have historically been limited. Such limited prioritisation perhaps reflects a view that research is not 'union business'; that research belongs in a university. There may be an element of anti-academic bias in teacher unions, a (sometimes justified) suspicion of the academic and the limits of academic analysis to practice in classrooms. Such views, however, represent a stereotypical perspective of what research might be, focusing on limits rather than possibilities.

Teacher unions have always professed their professional as well as their bargaining orientation. The dichotomy of whether a teacher union is essentially 'professional' or 'industrial' appears a perennial debate, as discussed in Lois Weiner's (1992) paper on Margaret Haley's 1904 speech to the National Education Association, in which Haley promoted the concept that teachers need to be organized both as unionists and intellectuals. The dichotomy was similarly addressed by Darling-Hammond (1992) who argued for teacher unions with a better balance between the inherent responsibilities to protect members and the long-term responsibility to advance the profession.

Kerchner and Caufman (1995) argue that current conditions and laws mean that teachers are still subject to coercion and exploitation, and that teachers' 'professional definition' cannot progress within existing external constraints which force a focus on economic and work conditions at the expense of professional focus. Put another way, the greater pressure is put on a teacher union by employers, governments and pressure groups, the less likelihood that resources for research will veer from the traditional industrial model of defence towards inquiry into professional issues. Should anyone doubt that

such pressure is alive and well today, the February 12, 1997, 'Report on Educational Research' (p 4) reported a meeting at the Alexis de Tocqueville Institution where American teacher unions were described as 'our evil empire' and where one speaker claimed that the:

"blame for the low opinion of education can be laid at teacher unions' doorstep, with their reputation for militant strike tactics, partisan politics and stances on controversial social issues."

With diatribes and rhetoric of that calibre, it comes as no surprise that there exists a necessary stress on research which allows teacher unions to defend their organizations against such attacks.

The NEA'a (1995-96) Handbook stated that :

"NEA Research collects and analyses data in support of NEA's strategic objectives and provides information and technical services for national, state, and local programs."

This appears to represent a traditional union approach where research is tied to organizational priorities - in this case strategic planning, employee advocacy, wages and benefits. Such research will always be a part of teacher unions, and rightly so. But it should be part of a dual focus of teacher unions' research efforts, alongside research into educational issues and educational change.

There exists some evidence of direct teacher union interest and involvement in professionally-oriented research. Rauth et al's (1982) Executive Summary of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) 'Research and Dissemination Program' described the union's efforts to connect teachers with research through problem-solving and discussion group approaches. This approach creditably promoted a connection with research, in which practitioners 'learned' from research, perhaps unwittingly promoting a sense of hierarchy in which research seemed to be placed above practice. The AFT's 'Thinking Mathematics' collaboration represented a shift towards a more equal relationship between teachers and researchers. While the 1982 program appeared to imply that practice and practitioners be 'guided' by research and researchers, the 1993 project led to a conceptualization of guiding principles based on an equitable relationship between practitioners and researchers.

In Canada two provincial unions with established professionally-oriented research capacity are in B.C and Saskatchewan, both provinces with governments which are at present more sympathetic to teacher unions than any other provincial governments. The Saskatchewan Teachers' Association's (STA) 'Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching'

provides funding for teachers to conduct research. In their (1996) "Learning From Practice: A Bulletin of Teacher Research", the STA reports:

"In just three years, teachers and others, with the assistance of the McDowell Foundation, have created an impressive body of research into teaching and learning. They have undertaken projects in such areas as violence, literacy, Aboriginal and cross-cultural education, gender equity, the environment, the attitudes and behaviour of students, children with special needs, the structure and processes of the school itself, and new instructional processes for various subjects and age groups. The results indicate that the McDowell Foundation is meeting its goal of assisting teachers to tackle through research a wide range of issue of importance in education."

It can be argued from the available evidence that teacher unions see their primary research role as one which defends or improves members' working conditions. But in politicised educational environments teachers' working conditions and professional lives are seriously impacted by educational change initiatives mandated by governments. The case for developing inquiry oriented approaches to educational change initiatives is therefore of fundamental importance. Such an approach not only maintains a teacher union's professional focus but also attempts to ensure that change initiatives are both educationally focused and manageable.

There are examples of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) research initiatives shared below, so they are not described here

New directions: concepts and strategies for teacher unions to utilise in a research and inquiry[1] approach

The approach is both conceptual and strategic; conceptual in that what is proposed necessitates a new way of thinking and strategic in the need to carry this new way of thinking into ever-shifting educational change environments where change is initiated by governments, influenced by motivated pressure groups, and scrutinised by media generally unsympathetic to teacher unions.

This section outlines the six components of a conceptual and strategic framework for unions to consider and describes how several examples of

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[1] I use the terms 'research' and 'inquiry' to convey both a traditional methodology with some sense of academic rigour (research); and to convey a sense of investigation and questioning which may utilise processes more empathic to teachers (inquiry). Neither term is exclusive, nor does either imply superiority. Teachers can and do engage in both, and so should teacher unions, depending on the issue.

inquiry provide illustrations of this framework, including a series of Case Studies and the union's inquiry into the issue of year-round schools.

1. Identifying principles against which educational change might be considered.

Such principles include clear benefits for students such as improved learning, manageability for teachers and the promotion of equity. There is nothing contradictory in these concepts, yet some would argue that a number of recent change proposals fail to take much notice of any such principles. Unions could be central in refocusing debate so that issues of improved learning, equity and manageability are stressed during debate. Teacher unions should offer leadership which reflects principles, and should argue against practices that do not reflect stated principles.

The identification and adherence to a principled stance would also help to focus internal debate and to construct a platform from which teacher unions could engage in media and public discussion.

2. Conceptualizing issues by considering the philosophical perspective reflected in an educational change proposal.

This involves stepping back from the immediacy of the current change initiative and asking what such an initiative reflects. 'Year 2000' (an educational reform introduced, implemented and subsequently scrapped in BC) reflected a constructivist philosophy. Consideration of the philosophy engaged many teachers, especially at the elementary level who found constructivism close to their preferred philosophy of teaching. Such teachers became enthusiastic about the innovation because they were comfortable and aligned with its philosophical origins. A more recent BC curriculum development and implementation process reflects a different philosophical perspective - closer to an 'additive' model, where it is assumed that knowledge and skills can be broken down into units that can be learned separately and sequentially. This model faces some resistance by the same teachers.

By conceptualizing issues we can put change in context. Such context facilitates reflection and discussion, and is of utility to teachers who can then consider where their teaching 'fits' within such context - where there is a close match and where there is disparity. It also allows for a consideration of proposals within ideological and political contexts, and for balancing and weighting of philosophy, ideology and politics within the individual teacher, between peers and within the proposed change.

We also need to differentiate between teachers' engaging in debate concerning philosophy and blocking implementation. Teachers might engage in a

constructive critique of a philosophical concept while adapting such a concept through active involvement in implementation. In this way we 'torque' areas such as curriculum and assessment until the implementation more closely matches the philosophy of the implementing teachers. Refining and redefining is a valid part of an inquiry process and a natural part of effective implementation processes.

3. Recognizing complexity and avoiding simplistic reactions.

Teachers have many differing views on a wide range of educational issues. Because teacher unions do not want to expose such differences we often produce simplistic responses to complex issue. We offer responses which aim to please everybody within the membership but which become bland and ineffective responses. It would be better to recognize differences and divisions at least internally, and engage in constructive debate. How differently might an issue be regarded between secondary and elementary teachers? Between teachers in different subject areas? How can we validate differences in developing more sophisticated responses? We need varied and innovative methods of engaging more members in the discussion, and of being open and understanding about differences. But recognizing such differences does not mean that any practice is acceptable - hence the need for principles.

It is even more important to offer leadership where there are differences between members than when a consensus exists. Such leadership is particularly important if teacher unions want to gain or maintain the respect of its members.

4. Recognizing workload issues, both within the union and for teachers and develop more flexible member involvement.

Do teacher unions have the internal capacity to develop a dialogue with members and to provide a respected response to government/school board initiatives? Too often we fail to recognize workload issues, and that both union staff and teachers may be carrying a heavy load. However, in some cases, teacher unions may have limited priorities for teacher release time related to addressing professional issues, and such priorities might be reconsidered.

More flexible release time for teachers to co-ordinate union inquiry/research into an issue would reduce central office staff workload, bring more practitioners into the inquiry process, increase and improve the level of debate on educational change. Current union strategies have alienated some members who are powerful change agents but who are not interested in how teacher unions have traditionally addressed educational change. Such

members often prefer to work outside union structures. Unions should aim to involve such members as a key part of developing strategy.

5. Redesigning internal structures and networks to be strategically effective.

What are we aiming to do in a research/inquiry process? How will this be done? Why? Who will do it? Developing cohesive strategy has not been the hallmark of teacher unions in addressing educational change, and because we have shown little strategic sense we are usually out-manoeuvered, or our views discounted. One way of responding to change is to be selective, to decide on what is important. Alternatively we might assess what we can influence and what we cannot, thereby avoiding wasting time and resources in fighting what we cannot change.

A more promising long-term strategy is to alter the nature of educational change to genuine collaboration at the formative level rather than being merely reactive after the event. There are some signs that this is already happening, albeit in isolated situations as discussed in the example of a district review of Special Education, as discussed on page 12.

Electronic communication might also play a significant part in improved structures and networks. Examples of promoting inquiry and communication through electronic communication are provided on page 11.

6. Building external partnerships based on principled agreement and common interest.

Teacher unions might consider forming more partnerships with groups such as district staff, school-based administrators (where not part of the union), trustees, university faculty and others to address educational change issues. There are some promising starting points for such collaborations, but they could be greatly expanded. One example is provided on page 13.

Another way of building coalitions is to agree on shared principles. Such partnerships or coalitions might be more effective in influencing change when common views are presented. To build such partnerships may be a slow process and to some extent requires the changing of organizational mindsets but it could pay off by reducing workload and by building stronger and more influential strategic coalitions.

The intended effects of using the new framework

Utilization of the framework shifts a teacher union from immediate reaction to longer-term inquiry and collaboration. This four intended effects:

1. By shifting to the inquiry mode the union avoids making immediate responses which are negatively portrayed and which subsequently hamper the union's credibility and influence in discussions and decision-making.
2. The union itself becomes more 'professional' in that it initiates research to further understanding instead of stating an immediate reaction which stifles exploration.
3. Communication with members is significantly improved as they become involved in the inquiry and as they read or hear of its progress.
4. Parents and community develop a better respect for the union as they observe union-sponsored research which encourages community participation. Teachers involved in research develop increased respect for the issues facing parents and community.

The conceptual and strategic framework in practice

A. Case Study Research

The Research Division of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation has sponsored a number of Case Study projects which have focused on two areas:
* the integration of students with special needs
* Staff Committees, a method of increasing teachers' roles in school governance.

The products of this project were two series of Case Studies, in both elementary and secondary schools, in inner-city, suburban and rural sites.

In each area, a similar design process was developed:
1. Initial research design published by the Research Division of the union, with an invitation for teachers to apply to participate either as site proponents or as teacher researchers.
2. Teachers selected and trained in Case Study methods. Data collection priorities adapted after teacher input.
3. Teachers initiate data collection. Research staff provide support through this and every stage of the project.
4. Teachers and research staff meet to discuss analysis and reporting.
5. Teachers produce reports, with content and style editing by research staff. Final control over content is in the hands of teachers.
6. Union Graphics division desktop publish reports. Case Study reports are printed and sold through union's resource distribution centre. The Staff Committee papers are published in hard copy as Research Reports and distributed to all local teacher association offices.

In terms of the integration Case Studies, the response of union members, parents, school district staff, government staff has been very positive. Educators see the studies as practical guides written by peers. For the authors the experience of conducting research with support and time was seen to be a

rewarding professional experience. That such an experience originated within their union was seen by the researchers and by other teachers as both an innovative yet appropriate role for the union's Research Division. One local college with a respected training program for teacher assistants lists the Case Studies as required reading for their trainees.

The Staff Committee Case Studies, only recently published, offer descriptions of school governance where such committees exist. With a variety of styles, the studies offer ideas on structures, processes and roles which make teachers' Staff Committees successful. Every teacher association in the province will receive copies of the studies, attractively produced and bound, and the studies will form the basis of further training for teachers interested in establishing Staff Committees in their schools.

See Appendix A for extracts form a Staff Committee Case Study report. A brochure describing the Integration Case Studies is also attached to this report.

B. The Year-Round School project

The piloting of inquiry into year-round schools was a government initiative intending to address the problems caused by rapidly increasing enrollment in a time of fiscal constraint. Seven school districts were given funding to consider the issue of whether they might develop year-round schools.

The project posed a dilemma for the teacher union which had existing policy opposing multi-track year-round schools "on the evidence to date". How should the union address the issue? After internal debate an inquiry-oriented approach was decided, in which the policy position was effectively put on hold and an extensive inquiry process was initiated. This consisted of:

1. Conducting extensive literature searches, collecting hard copy reports and producing a data base of research and other information relevant to year round schools.
2. Contacting teachers in schools where pilots were being considered, and the local unions representing all teachers in the school district. Meetings were convened to ascertain teachers' and local union data and research needs. Differences between site-level and teacher union perspectives were explored.
3. Finding and providing information on request from either individual teachers or from local unions.
4. Writing research reports on issues of prevalence, cost-effectiveness, and educational achievement.
5. Offering to share all data and analysis with district staff and parents.
6. Making presentations on request to local 'inquiry groups', most of which were collaborative groups of teachers, non-teaching staff, administrators and parents.

7. Supporting district-based research efforts at the request of teachers and others at the local level.
8. Participating in year-round school conference planning with local universities, district and ministry staff.

During the pilot project it became clear that the union was playing a lead role in inquiry. The extensive collection of existing research facilitated the inquiry of the district collaborative groups but also allowed discussion, analysis and reporting from a research-based stance. One interesting area of discussion focused on the principle of equity. Did the proposal to have year round schools in areas of high growth reduce equity by establishing two types of schools, one in areas where there was little population growth, and another in the high-growth areas? Such discussion was prompted in part by the discovery that many year-round schools in the USA were in low socio-economic areas.

Teachers involved in the project at the school and district level could access union-collected materials with ease, use them in their own analyses which in turn became part of the data bank of research stored in hard copy and electronically at the union office. Conceptually the union was seen to be 'doing things differently' by engaging in the projects in ways that were based on sound research processes and in 'talking through' the issue without adhering to a rigid policy position that effectively pre-empted discussion. Operationally the union was seen to have developed effective and open processes for communication and dialogue. When year-round schools were largely rejected by school districts it was because the inquiry process had found the concept wanting, and the union's role in positive, critical inquiry was generally welcomed by members and respected by parents, school district staff and others engaged in the process.

C. Promoting inquiry utilising electronic communication

The BC Teachers' Federation has extensively developed electronic communications. All teacher associations have e-mail and Internet access provided by the union. There are several listservs and a union web site (http://www.bctf.bc.ca/bctf), with a wide range of information about the union, and a number of its publications and reports accessible. To facilitate teacher inquiry, the web site includes:

i. **The "Teacher Inquirer"**, a small scale e-zine which publishes some local teacher research. The 'Inquirer' format is a spoof on the 'National Inquirer', with headlines such as 'Burnaby teachers storm the Big Apple!' (when a collaborative teacher research group presented at AERA in New York). The lighter side of the 'Inquirer' has photographs and/or comic-style graphics, but a teacher research report is also featured in each edition. The 'Inquirer' is a fledgling enterprise, with four issues to date.

See Appendix B for an example of the more flippant side of the 'Inquirer'.

ii. **An ESL home page**, which includes three data bases with about 800 entries to date covering Learning Resources (materials to use in classrooms), Cultural and Anti -Racist information (with particular reference to the cultural composition of the province) and Parent Communication (materials translated into a number of languages).
See Appendix C for the ESL home page format and an example from the data base.

iii. **A proposal to facilitate inquiry through listservs.**

One listserv, for teacher union presidents, is currently widely used by participants to pose questions of other presidents. Topics range but focus on issues of concern, both contractual and professional. An example might be whether any research has been conducted in district X on the issue of violence in schools. One participant submits the question to all the other presidents, but at present replies go only to the person posting the question. Facilitating inquiry through the listserv would involve union research staff in a form of electronic collating of responses, so that all input to the given issue is available to any teacher/teacher union researcher. It's an easy and relatively painless way to collect province-wide data, provide local information and save members' time.

D. The BCTF 'Program For Quality Teaching'

This program, offered through the union's Professional Development Division offers training in peer consultation and teacher research in support of teachers' critical inquiry of practice:

"The 'Program For Quality Teaching' provides teachers through the process of peer consultation and collaboration, a framework within which they, as practitioners, can engage in critical inquiry of their own and each other's professional practices - thus changing fundamentally the basis on which changes occur in teaching. Often we seek educational change by raising the latest "innovation" flag with little time given to practitioners for critical assessment and integration."
(Program for Quality Teaching, 1993)

A group of teachers and union staff design and lead the training sessions, and the group meets with teacher researchers to offer support and advice on projects as they evolve. Initial training includes: different approaches to classroom research, writing skills, problem-solving, ethics/protocols and support systems,

E. Collaborative research with teacher locals and with school districts

In School District # 42, Maple Ridge, there exists a collaborative relationship between the district and the teacher association, with time release for teacher research sponsored by the district and with some training for the researchers provided by the central union's 'Program For Quality Teaching'.

In addition, the local teachers' association recently initiated, with full district support, a review of Special Education in the district. The review consisted of a survey in which responses were collected from teachers, administrators and support workers to a wide range of questions ranging from attitudes about inclusion to specific areas of success or concern. This was followed by Focus Groups in all schools in which qualitative data identified key themes and issues which teachers and others wished to address. Following the Focus Groups, a district-wide professional development day took place in which educators and support workers provided input to action plans for the future development of special education in the district.

The Maple Ridge Special Education Review is significant in three ways:
1. It demonstrates high levels of collaboration and trust between district and union to promote inquiry.
2. It reflects sophisticated union research capacity at the local level.
3. It models effective collaboration between local and central union researchers.

The central union research staff provided training for Focus Group facilitators and acted as a 'critical friend' to the local union's primary research role as well as funding teachers' release time so that teachers could write reports of the research. In this project the central union was therefore responsive to local research.

The growing confidence and capacity of local teacher associations to conduct inquiry will allow for a new, facilitative role for the central union's research staff in support of local teacher association inquiry efforts.

F. Collaborations with external agencies

Occasionally issues emerge which a central organization can recognize as significant because of the prevalence of calls or concerns from a range of members. Secondary school scheduling was such a recent issue. With the emergence of the Copernican timetable system and growth of the semester system there have been concerns expressed in areas as diverse as effects on teachers' professional lives and limited preparation time. To promote inquiry on this issue the Research Division planned a conference with the University of British Columbia's Continuing Professional Education

Department. Teachers, union presidents, school administrators and ministry staff made presentations and facilitated discussion.

Prior to the conference union research staff produced a binder of research, including a local materials annotated bibliography, ERIC searches, a bibliography of relevant web sites, and a number of key papers on pertinent issues. At the conference participants were able to access bookmarked web sites related to scheduling.

Our intention was to promote collegial conversations across organizational boundaries and to facilitate inquiry through the preparation of the binders and access to the web sites. A future role for the union's research staff may be to identify a current 'hot issue' in education and to collaboratively design an inquiry-oriented annual conference addressing the issue, thereby promoting dialogue and professional conversation.

G. Support for individual teacher research projects and small networks

One example of this occurred when a teacher interested in conducting research into the issue of how teachers might support parents to improve children's reading approached the Research Staff of the BCTF for support, which was provided. Such support included critiquing of drafts and publishing the first completed report on our electronic teacher research journal, the 'Teacher Inquirer'. Subsequent presentations of the teacher's work led to the formation of a small but growing network of parents and teachers interested in promoting teacher-parent collaboration in support of literacy, particularly in a multicultural environment. The next step for the network is a workshop for other parents and teachers on strategies that have worked for members of the network. Support from the Research Division of the union is being provided to this network on an on-going basis. This kind of support is low-key and facilitative. It maintains the control of projects by those who initiated them but fosters success by providing teacher release time, a place to meet, some word processing, and whatever help is needed to complete the research.

H. The teacher research project in Assessment

In sponsoring this teacher research project the BCTF Research Division wanted to consider teachers' current assessment practices in the context of mandated changes in reporting. The results of this inquiry are intended to promote professional conversation about assessment and reporting. Grants for release time of up to five days were available. Teachers from both elementary and secondary school were encouraged to apply for the grants.

The teacher researchers were selected and invited to a one-day seminar at the BCTF to consider teacher research methods and issues and to share ideas for

their projects. It was hoped that this meeting might encourage a dialogue between researchers during the project. Other than the projects being on the theme of assessment there was no control by the union in terms of content or process.

The project was intended to encourage professional reflection on practice, and to share the results of such reflections with a wider audience of teachers. Each participant was required to contribute a paper towards a publication on assessment practices . The papers have been published by the BCTF and distributed to all teacher associations. Professional development sessions featuring roundtable sharing of the key themes addressed in this research are currently being planned.

An extract from one of the reports is shown in Appendix D.

Conclusion

While most of the research which reflects the conceptual and strategic framework was initiated at the central union level, the framework was far from clear at the outset. Sensing that many current union strategies could be more effective, the union's Research Division wanted to address some issues in different ways in order to be more effective and more relevant to our members. The defining and clarification of both concepts and strategies has evolved and become clearer over time. It has been substantially influenced by the input of teachers participating in projects. Communication within the union has increased, engaging both union staff and teachers in a deeper consideration of issues through inquiry. Dialogue with other educators and with parents has also been improved.

This paper defines both concepts and strategies, and attempts to describe an evolving teacher union approach to addressing educational issues and educational change. The ideas in this paper share some of the philosophy of the 'Teacher Union Reform Network'[2], whose website report "Transforming Teacher Unions to Become Agents of Reform" states:

"Including the unions as partners in transforming public education is essential to achieving the ultimate goal of improving student learning. Progressive union leaders have begun to recognize that fundamental cultural change in their own organizations is a precondition to broader reforms that will culminate in better education for students. Just as industrial trade unions have recently begun to discover, rapid and unpredictable changes in the environment now demand the rethinking of the roles and structures of unions."

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[2] url for the Teacher Union Reform Network is http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/turn/turn.html

I have stressed the need for teacher unions to provide a more significant focus on professional issues and to utilise collaborative inquiry approaches as a means to this end. Teacher unions may or may not choose to shift resources and philosophies to greater inquiry and research. But there are imperatives to do so, from the interest of teachers for a more relevant professional focus in their union to the need to more effectively engage in educational change issues. Regardless of future policy shifts, this paper attempts to demonstrate that it is possible for a teacher union to engage in inquiry and research with limited resources.

Charlie Naylor, BCTF Research

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Appendices

A. The Staff Committee project, report extracts.

B. Teacher Inquirer, BC teacher research on the Internet

C. The ESL home page and data bases example

D. Teacher Research in Assessment project, report extracts

BCTF Research

dorothy lynas elementary

North Vancouver

Staff Committee Project

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Verena Foxx

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Initiation - Experience

In spite of all this support, however, the staff-committee model at Dorothy Lynas is not for everyone. Some new members abstain by not getting involved, and others transfer to other schools.

A mentoring system (*see* Figure 9) has been created for members new to the Staff Committee, who often feel overwhelmed by this new experience and rarely participate during the first term.

The mentoring process, illustrated by the reverse pyramid diagram, is a growth process which begins in the fall and evolves over the school year, starting small and expanding to a broad base by June. Specifically, when new staff arrive in September they are given a Welcome (see top of *New Members Pyramid: September*), and a copy of the 28-page *Staff Committee Policy Book* to familiarize themselves with the school's staff committee.

New members are reminded about staff committee meetings (October-November), and are encouraged to attend. The historical background of the founding members and the evolution of the staff committee to its present format are described for them (November-December).

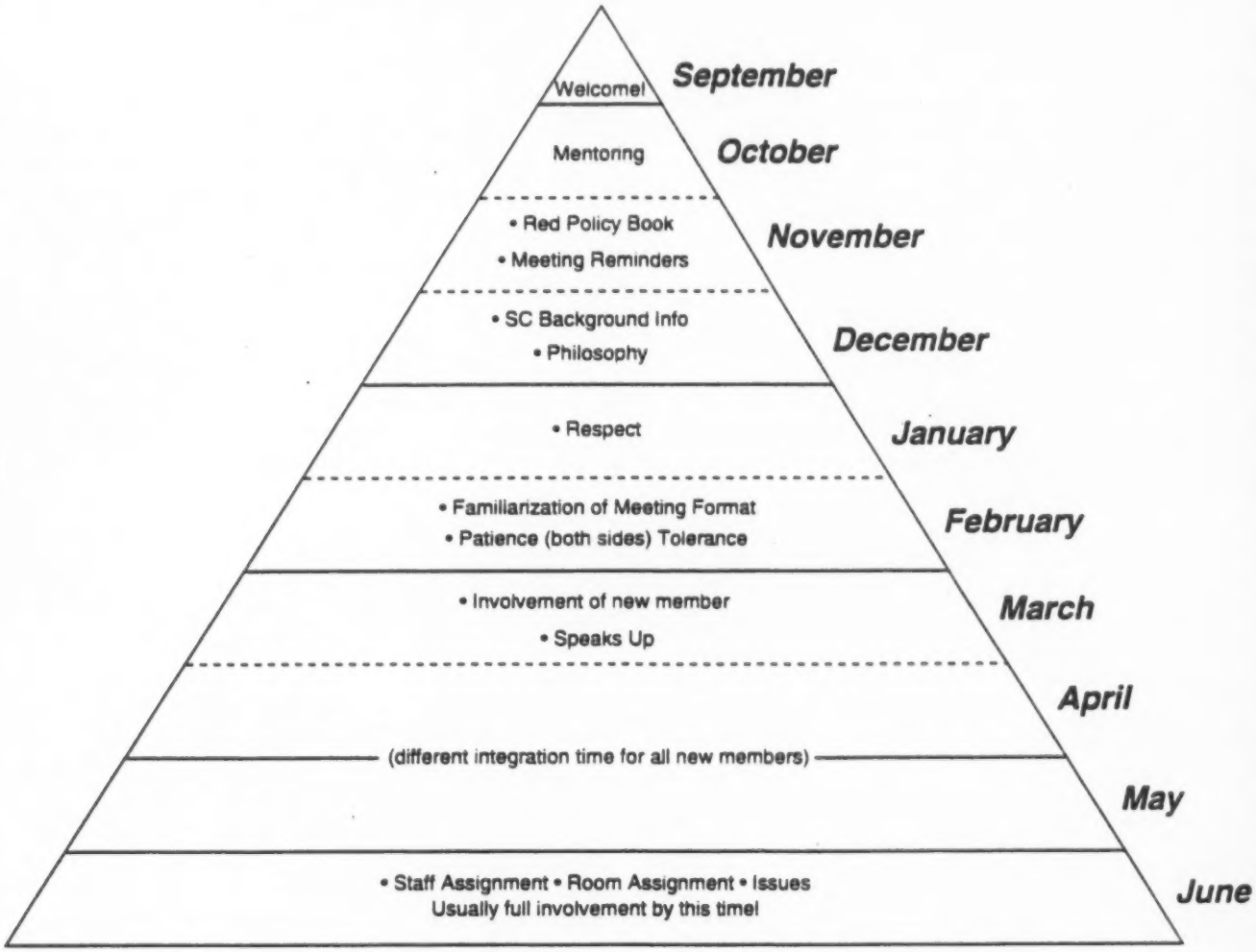
In the early part of the new year (January-February), new members are feeling more familiar with the staff committee, and gradually begin to get involved. At this time, there is mutual patience, respect and tolerance toward new members. Generally, by spring (March-April), new members are beginning to feel more confident and are involved in discussions.

By June (see bottom of the pyramid), when staff assignments and room assignments are discussed by the Staff Committee, it is in the best interests of all staff members to be involved, so that their specific needs and interests are fairly and democratically addressed.

In spite of all this support, however, the staff-committee model at Dorothy Lynas is not for everyone. Some new members abstain by not getting involved, and others transfer to other schools.

Figure 9

NEW MEMBERS
Increasing Level of Involvement



Power and Influence

The Staff Committee makes decisions concerning students (report card dates, school calendar activities, finance decisions for teaching materials), and passes these items on to the AO for approval.

The staff committee at Dorothy Lynas has both governing (power) and advisory (influence) responsibilities (*see* Figure 10).

In its governing role, the Staff Committee has set policies and procedures for 21 school-related items (*see* diagram 1, Table of Contents, *Staff Committee Policy Book*).

For example, the Professional Development Policy states clearly that:

> *"each teacher shall decide his/her own professional development needs and where applicable, shall participate with other teachers in the carrying out of those professional development activities."*

In terms of the funding and allocation thereof, the policy states that:

> *"the current Collective Agreement provides for a Fund contribution of $90,000 from the Board and $16,000 from the NVTA. There is 95% of the current money allocated to each school staff on an FTE basis. The present allotment to Ecole Dorothy Lynas School is approximately $132 per FTE."*[7]

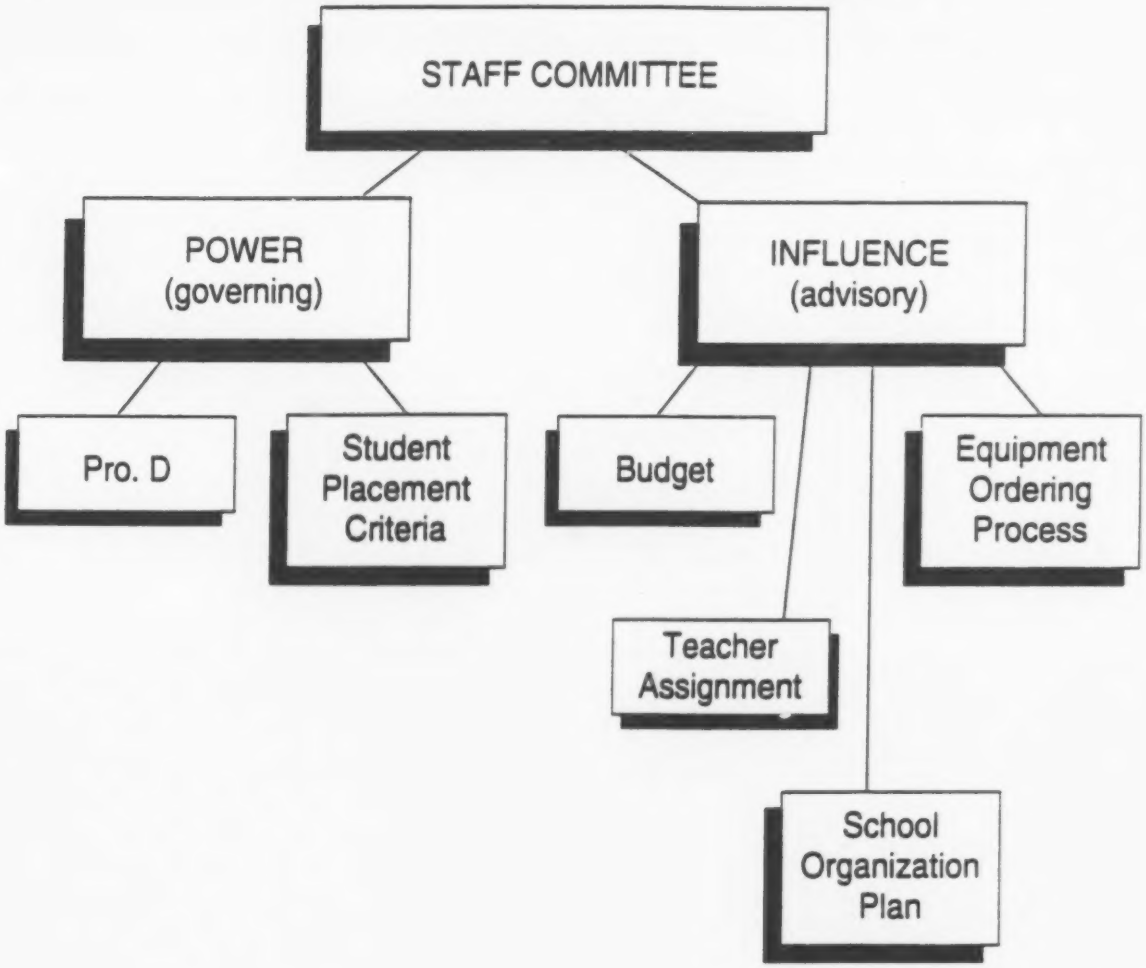
The Professional Development Policy further outlines the committee membership (Pro-D Chairperson, Primary Representative, Intermediate Representative), and the procedure and guidelines for administering PD funds. The AO is not involved in professional development decisions.

In its advisory role (influence), the Staff Committee is advised by sub-committees (Primary, Intermediate Teams) within the school, which share information and concerns. The Staff Committee makes decisions concerning students (report card dates, school calendar activities, finance decisions for teaching materials), and passes these items on to the AO for approval.

[7] *Staff Committee Policy Book*, page 5

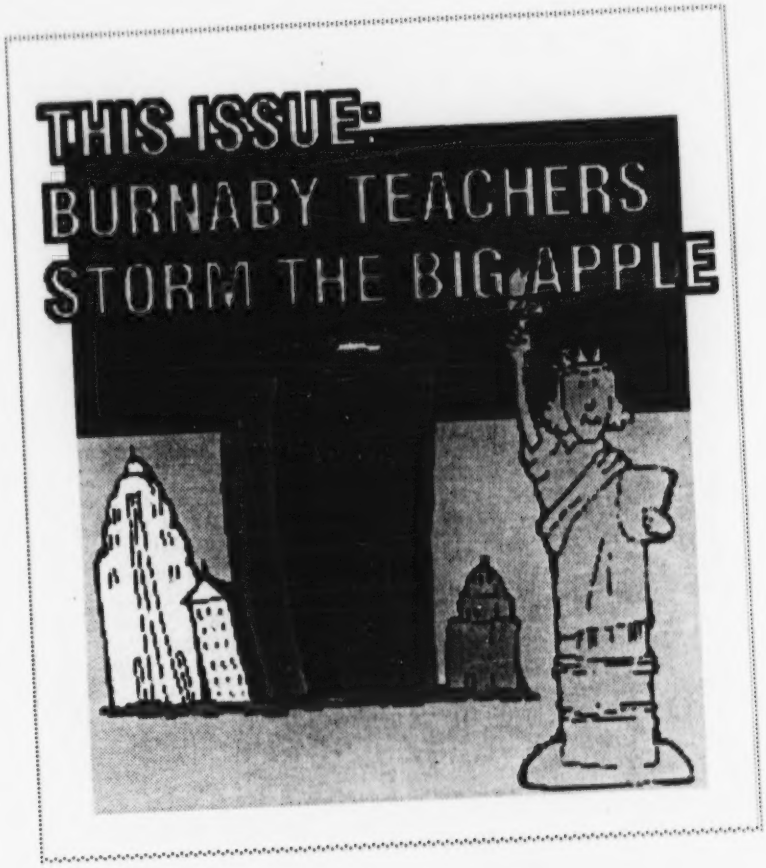
Figure 10

POWER AND INFLUENCE



TEACHER INQUIRER

JUNE 1996



THE STORMERS!

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Teacher Research as Professional Development?

Yes, indeed. Teacher research as professional development is becoming more accepted as teachers plan and manage their own collaborative research projects. This month we feature the efforts of teachers at Glenwood Elementary in Burnaby, who not only undertook inquiry but also presented their research in New York.

In the next edition of the *Inquirer* we will have news from teachers in Saanich of another exciting model of teacher research as professional development.

Burnaby teachers storm the big apple

Prior to storming New York, staff from Glenwood stormed into their teacher research projects which included inquiry into:

- Science IRP and its assessment methods
- Early writing
- Reading/writing reference sets
- Student self-esteem, peer relations
- Multi-age groupings

How was it done?

Teachers researched in pairs or small groups, having this research as their pro-d focus for the year.

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The whole group met once a month to share progress.

The monthly meetings included discussion with external facilitator Sharon Jeroski.

Some of the group were experienced in traditional research methods and/or in teacher research, so there was some mentoring.

More details of the process can be found in the report: "Where do the mermaids stand?: Teacher Research as Professional Development at the School Level"

So where does New York come into it?

SFU prof Peter Grimmett joined the group for occasional dialogue and suggested the idea of presenting their work at the presigious American Educational Research Association (AERA) in New York, held in April, 1996. And they did! Showing incredible inventiveness the whole school staff found dollars from personal, school, district and university funds and presented twice at the conference.

The initiation and completion of their projects reflects teacher research at its best: collaborative, stimulating, productive, and focusing on improving practices which benefit student learning and enhance professional understanding. The teachers undertaking research felt strong accountability to themselves and the group. By sharing their work they offer other teachers some insights into how teacher research can be valid professional development.

Thanks to all the staff at Glenwood School from the *Teacher Inquirer*.

If you have experiences on teacher research that you would like to share in the *Inquirer*, send them to: Charlie Naylor, cnaylor@bctf.bc.ca

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SEPTEMBER 1996

Sensational Scoop from Saanich!

Quote of the Month

(from a *Times Educational Supplement* article, June 28, 1996)

> **"Academic research is only read by seven people on average, and that includes the writer's mother."**
>
> (attributed to a publisher of a UK academic journal)

I recently saw this title on a UK academic journal:

> **"Univariate andmultivariate omnibus Hypotheisis Tests selected to Control**

Type 1 Error rates When Population Variances are not necessarily Equal"

Wonder whose mother would plough through that one!

Home Pages for Action Research

I recently came across Jack Whitehead's home page on action research at the University of Bath, UK. You can check out the Master's degree action research program and full text of two theses utilising action research, as well as various musings by Jack himself. This home page connects to the Queen's University action research home page in Kingston, Ontario, which has some very good, SHORT pieces of writing on teacher/action research.

Please feel free to share any useful Internet sites with readers of the 'Exchange'.

Contact: Charlie Naylor, cnaylor@bctf.bc.ca

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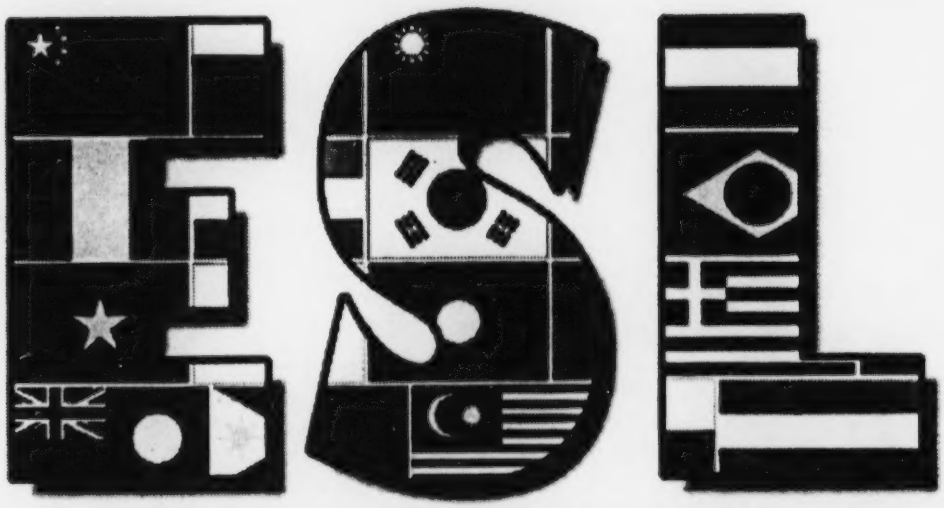

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE HOME PAGE

A BCTF Research Initiative

BCTF ESL databases

Cultural and Anti-Racist Information

Learning Resources

Parent Communication

BCTF ESL Reports

Internet Links to ESL Sites

Contact Charlie Naylor, cnaylor@bctf.bc.ca

BCTF ESL Database Cultural & Anti-Racist Information

Page 1 of 1 page for which:

- title contains the phrase "health"

Cross Cultural Caring: A Handbook for Health Professionals

Organization:

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Description: Written for Vancouver health professionals but very useful for teachers, this book describes particular ethnic groups which have settled in the metropolitan area, with information about the education, religion and political systems of home countries. Written by people of the ethnic group, and covering the following groups: Cambodians/Laotians, Central Americans, Chinese, Iranians, Japanese, South Asians, Vietnamese, West Indians

Cultural Orientation: Cambodian, Central American, Chinese, Iranian, Japanese, South Asian, Vietnamese, Caribbean

Format: book

Target Audience: teachers

Contact Person:

Address: A copy of the book can be viewed in the BCTF Information Centre at 100-550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. V5Z

Phone: 871-2244 **Fax:** 871-2294

Email: ganderson@BCTF.BC.Ca

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ISBN no.: 0-774-0343-6 **Cost:** $20

BCTF Research

Linking Criterion-Referenced Assessment With Goal-setting Practices

Sharon Anderson,
David Cameron Elementary,
Sooke

The Teacher Research Project
(Assessment)

January, 1997

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Linking Criterion-Referenced Assessment With Goal Setting Practices

1. My Questions about Goal Setting

How can criterion based assessment practices help children set realistic and attainable goals?

Secondary questions:
How do my current goal setting practices link to the criterion based assessment practices I am beginning to use?
How can children participate in setting criteria for specific projects or units of study, and set goals while working on the unit/project?

2. My School, and my Classroom Configuration

David Cameron Elementary is in the Colwood area of Victoria. The school has a Provincial Resource Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, with 11 students integrated into four of its twelve classrooms. It has a population of 330 students. The area is a mixture of middle and lower classes, with a small First Nations community close to the school.

When the Primary Program was first introduced, David Cameron Elementary became an implementation school for the Sooke School District. Many changes were undertaken by the whole school. Some of these changes were creating multi-aged classes, removing letter grades from report cards in Intermediate Grades, and using portfolios for assessment and evaluation. In addition student-led three-way conferences were conducted with goals for the next term being set, and, the report card being written as a summary of the conference. All of these practices were in use when letter grades were reintroduced, and criterion-referenced assessment practices were introduced by the Ministry of Education.

One major consideration facing me was how to combine criterion based assessment practices with the goal setting practices that I felt had been so successful. I wanted to continue to have my students participate in setting their learning goals and, at the same time, learn about, and begin to use criterion referenced assessment practices. I did not want my students to work solely for an end result or letter grade, but rather to learn to use assessment for planning future work.

I have 22 students aged eight-through ten years old, with 8 students in Grade three, and 14 students in Grade four. Of the Grade Four students, 7 are in my class for a second year. This class is of mixed abilities, and has 6 students on an Individualized Educational Program, 4 of whom are in the Provincial Resource Program, as well as 4 other students who receive additional

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assistance through Integration Support, counseling or assistance from the First Nations Support Worker.

3. My beliefs about assessment and evaluation as they relate to goal setting:

As I thought more about how to begin using these new practices, I re-examined my beliefs about learning and the learner. I talked and worked with my colleagues. I looked through the "Supporting Learning" document, the Primary and Intermediate Program documents, and, the Integrated Resource Packages (IRP's). I felt it was important to see how my beliefs about learning and the learner compared with Ministry documents, common practices in my classroom, and new plans I was making for teaching and assessment.

I believe:

Positive self-esteem is necessary for learning.

• "Children need positive, realistic self-esteem in order to develop their individual potential. The way they feel about themselves is related to their ability to learn. (Bruner, 1960) The classroom climate and nature of school work contributes directly to the way children feel about themselves." (page 7, Supporting Learning)

Risk taking helps learning.

• "Children learn best in an environment that encourages risk-taking and learning from their mistakes. (Goodman, 1986; Smith, 1974)" (page 7, Supporting Learning)

A supportive learning climate is necessary for learning.

• "People think and learn within a community. When teachers work together to explore and reflect on ideas and strategies, when families reinforce classroom experiences and offer models to enhance students' thinking, and when teachers, families, and students work together to share insights and information, thoughtful learning is enhanced." (page 2, Thinking in the Classroom Volume 1)

• "When children grow and develop in an environment that is positive and supportive, they are more enthusiastic, more willing to take risks, and better able to set and actualize their goals." (page 54, Primary Program Foundation Document)

The ability to set learning goals leads to independence in learning.

- "Learning requires the active participation of the learner. Examining one's beliefs and knowledge is essential for successful learning." (page 6, Supporting Learning)
- "The teacher supports the child by honoring every child's efforts and accomplishments and by helping children take on increasing responsibility for setting their own goals, directing their own learning, and monitoring and assessing their own progress." (page 54, Primary Program Foundation Document)

Other children, parents, and teachers help children learn.

- Learning is both an individual and a social process. (Year 2000: A Framework for Learning)

- "Children learn through collaboration with others. Social, emotional and intellectual development is fostered through interaction with others. All significant development and learning occurs in the context of social interaction. (Vygotsky, 1978; Wells, 1986)" (page 7, Supporting Learning)

Cooperative learning helps children learn.

- "Learning to cooperate and cooperating to learn promote individual learning, build self-esteem, enhance interpersonal relationships, and build the concept of community." (page 56, Primary Program Foundation Document)

4. Developing the first goal

During the first few weeks of the school year, I devoted lots of time to building a supportive and encouraging classroom climate. I wanted students to know that their support system consisted of myself, their classmates, their parents, and themselves. I wanted students to know that a positive working environment in the classroom builds success and that this success can be in intellectual areas of development as well as in social areas. I charted students' interests and asked parents for their ideas to help me plan the course we would follow.

In addition, on the first day of school, I had students write a note to a Kindergarten student giving them advice about school. We gathered these ideas and put them on a chart which we used for the first few days for our own classroom 'rules'. We reviewed and 'clumped' these over the first week, and, adjusted or added any things we felt were needed.

We chose a class name and motto that best fit in with our advice. This year, we called ourselves The D. C. Raptors, and our motto was "we believe learning means listening, looking and thinking."

Whenever a problem arose, we referred back to our belief and saw if what happened fit our belief. If it didn't, we planned how to fix it so we could be successful the next time. We talked about what was going well and what needed to be fixed.

From these discussions came our first whole class goal "we will look at the person who is talking". We looked at what needed to change, planned ways to do so, and, thought about how we would support each other in achieving this goal. We reviewed our work on our goal and recognized progress. Once that goal was met, we decided if our classroom advice "learning means listening, looking and thinking" was working for us. Once we felt comfortable with our motto, we were ready to move on.

5. Beginning criterion-referenced assessment (teacher set criteria)

Towards the end of the first month of school, I made a list of the students' goals from last year's third term report card. As a class, we chose to work on one of these goals– "we will vary our stories". We wrote it as a goal statement, we developed a class plan for working on the goal, we built support networks, and, we made individual goal tracking sheets. As we worked on this goal, I chose criteria and shared with the students my expectations. The criteria for this goal were broad and intended to be answered by students with a yes or no (see chart following).

Criteria for our Writing Goal

I can write a story with the setting in the mountains.

My stories have suspense. They build the readers' interest.

My stories have a beginning, a middle and an ending.

I choose powerful words for my stories.

My sentences are a complete idea.

We worked on this goal for about two weeks with the students tracking the progress they felt they were making. We discussed what helped and hindered our progress (see Plus/Minus Chart following).

Plus/Minus Chart

Plus

I kept good care of my story so I didn't lose it again.

I sat by myself so no one's there to bug me and make noise.

I got to do more stories.

I wrote longer stories.

I got lots of ideas for my stories.

It was fun to have the idea given. It helped me write.

I think first, then I write so I'll become a better story writer.

I practiced my handwriting.

Minus

Sometimes I was talking more than working.

We repeated this process a second time with a new whole class goal to help students see the value of a support network, and to learn more about keeping criteria for an assignment in mind as we are working. As our work progressed, I included student input and ideas about criteria. Students were becoming comfortable with the goal setting process and were positive about working on these goals. They were beginning to evaluate their work and to rely on their supporters for encouragement and compliments.

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